

## Science-Based Solutions for Menu Nutrition Labelling in a Harmonized Way

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Menu nutrition labelling is a mandatory requirement in some European countries, like Romania, for example [1,2]. The menu's dishes and beverages composition and the nutritional impact on the public health are the main reasons for authorities to introduce this public declaration for all foodservice facilities.

The complex composition of the menu dishes and beverages formulas and the costs involved in the menu nutrition labelling are the limitative conditions for correctly applying this legal requirement.

Science-based solutions need to be involved in order to solve the public issues of foodservices suppliers (restaurants, bistro's, canteen's, pubs, event facilities, etc.) and national authorities which verify the legal conformity of menu's nutrition labelling.

Harmonized rules of menu nutrition labelling represent the key for transparency in declaration and equity in commercialization, in the benefit of the final consumer.

The final consumer need correct and simple information regarding the energy value and principal components with impact on human health. In this moment, the legislation is axed on the nutritional components with negative impact on public health but the balance of nutrients from daily's diets need to be considered, not for individual dishes, beverages or meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner, event menus).

In fact, there is no bad or good nutrients, only bad or good food quantities and combinations. The first principle in good nutrition is the diversity of natural sources for the main nutrients in all meals, secondly, the strictly respect of the principal daily meals, thirdly, the quantity adapted to the individual necessities. To assess and incriminate the "bad" nutrients from individual dishes represent an error because unbalance the daily intake of nutrients from various sources and discriminate foods under their content in so called bad natural components. Is the case of butter, vegetable oils, cheese, cream, chocolate, etc., with a natural composition based on fats, sugars and salts, which are discriminated instead of integrate them in balanced diets in the correct amounts (25 - 50g daily, for example).

In this conditions, firstly, different assessment need to be realized for menu packages (host table such wedding, anniversary, conference menus) and à la carte menus.

In case of table d'hôte menus, the individual nutrition assessment for each dishes and the menu package need to be declared for all principal nutrients, not only for fats, saturated fats, salt, carbohydrates.

The personalized diets need to be created for social groups and public communities (scholars, academics, medical, army, etc.) and the final user well-informed about its nutritional needs and the evolution of these necessities in each life decade under different circumstances (special needs due to individual health status or particular diseases).

A legal measure regarding the menu nutritional labelling need to be integrated in a social public package of nutritional status assessment for each group and social communities, with information about correct personalized diets and adapted nutrition for special needs. Only in these circumstances, the goal of increasing public health could be attained because the final consumer is aware of its nutrition choices impact and its diet consequences.

In case of à la carte menus, each item choice, based on food preferences, affects drastically the final nutrition impact, in terms of caloric and nutritional intake. The combination of dishes in à la carte menus is all at the consumer preferences and the nutritional impact is not just cumulative, is also synergistic. The simple individual declaration of caloric and nutritional dishes profile could not be considered that all dishes & beverages from a menu represent the sum of these individuals, because the metabolic impact is different considering the order and combinations of food nutrients. For example, if the starter is a salad without dressing the metabolic speed is higher than in case of red dry sausages, meats assortments, meats associated with cheeses, terrines, etc.

The human body uses the nutrients in a natural way, from simple to complex, from easy-to-be-metabolised in one-two hours to difficult to be metabolised in four to six hours, from non-maturated to well-maturated foods, etc. The association with beverages, alcoholic or/and non-alcoholic, increases the individual impact on metabolic rate and nutrients availability.

The science-based solution that the author proposes to be used in the harmonised menu nutrition labelling is the personalized nutrition assessment of the daily nutrients intake correlated with using the menu composition information's declared on the nutrition label, as a single solution to correct individual, groups and social communities nutrition. Without considering the correct order and quantities of dishes in a personalized menu with individual dish nutrition label there is no considerable impact on public health.

The demonization of certain food groups because they have an important amount of natural saturated fats or sugar is not the solution because it unbalances the daily diets, creates frustration and does not solve the problem of obesity and metabolic-associated diseases. The public nutrition education and the correct nutrition labelling for foods, beverages and menus need to be applied, in public policies, at the same time, for sustainable societal results.

Also, regarding the menu nutrition labelling, the caloric and nutritional profile is a difficult task to be accomplished by the national foodservice system in a short time. For this reason, the calculations are, in most cases, incorrect and the public authorities have not the legal tool to remediate this issue and offer the unique, harmonized solution for correct legal declaration.

The food and culinary item standard could represent the reference for the public authorities inspections but this tool needs to be nominated in the legislative text of menu nutrition labelling law. Not at least, the final consumer, the society in fact, needs to accept the cost of this solution because to create a standard for dishes is a complex scientific task, more difficult than those necessary for classical foods or beverages.

Harmonization of key science-based solutions could be implemented by the academia in collaboration with the standardisation association, integrating the society needs and considering implementation power of the foodservices units. In the previous research study [3], the author proposed a simple legal procedure of expressing and designing the menu's nutrition declaration strictly according with the Annex XV of Regulation (EU) NO. 1169/2011 requirements [4], in a classic format (listed in the menu, as a nutritional statement) and in an electronic format (QR code).

## Bibliography

1. National Authority for Consumer Protection Order no. 201 of April 19, 2022 regarding the provision of information on the marketing of finished products/food provided by collective catering units.
2. National Authority for Consumer Protection.
3. Vintila Iuliana. "Scientific Solutions for Nutrition Labelling of Menus - A New Challenge for the Catering Industry". *EC Nutrition* 18.4 (2023): 01-03.
4. Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, amending Regulations (EC) No 1924/2006 and (EC) No 1925/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

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